









A
SERMON,
DELIVERED BEFORE THE
CONVENTION
OF THE
PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH
IN THE
STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA,

Held in St. James's Church, Philadelphia, May 3, 1815;

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BY THE REV. FREDERICK BEASLEY, D. D.
Provost of the University of Pennsylvania.

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SCC



A SERMON, &c.

JOHN xxi. 17.

He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?

Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord! thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

ST. JOHN, the beloved disciple, in the strain of whose composition there are a tenderness and an amenity which have never been surpassed, if ever equalled, by any sacred or profane author, here exhibits a most affecting interview of the Apostles with their divine Master, that took place in the interval between his resurrection and ascension. Jesus Christ after having given them at this interview, as at many others, infallible proofs of his resurrection, before he takes his final leave of them, addresses himself particularly to St. Peter, whose ardour and vehemence of temper and disposition, at the same time that they exposed him to danger, and sometimes hurried him into the most culpable excesses, nevertheless rendered him one of the most interesting, if not the most interesting of the twelve Apostles. As if the more deeply to impress upon his mind, the high responsibility of the station he should occupy after his departure, thrice, at that solemn moment, he repeats the enquiry, "Simon, son

of Jonas, lovest thou me?" and when Peter with characteristic impetuosity, immediately replies, "Lord! thou knowest that I love thee;" he rejoins, as if to make him sensible of the most incontestable evidence he could give of that love, feed my sheep.

Such, my reverend brethren, is the station which you at present occupy. As was St. Peter and his illustrious colleagues, in this pure and primitive age, so are you now, shepherds commissioned by Christ, under the most solemn injunctions of fidelity, to feed the flock which he hath purchased with his own blood. You are ambassadors, accredited by God to promulge his holy law, and proclaim amongst men the terms on which he will condescend to be reconciled to them. You are stewards of the mysteries of grace. To your superintendence the Saviour hath committed the manifold and momentous concerns of his church. In a word, the everlasting interests of mankind most largely depend upon your fidelity and diligence in the discharge of your sacred functions. What an office do you hold! How dignified and important is it! How awful your responsibility to your supreme Lord! To each of you at his ordination, your divine Master virtually addressed his enquiry to St. Peter, "lovest thou me?" and left him at the same time the solemn admonition to demonstrate his love by feeding his sheep; that is, by a diligent and anxious attention to his parochial duties.

I assure you, my brethren, I am fully sensible of the delicacy and importance of the task imposed upon me, on this occasion, by our venerable Diocesan, and feel myself under sacred obligations faithfully to perform it. It is our duty, at all times, "to provoke one another to love and to good works;" but more especially so at such opportunities as the present. I should consider myself as delinquent in

duty, you yourselves, I am assured, would not excuse me, should I not address you, on this occasion, with that candour, and freedom, and boldness, which become the minister of Jesus Christ. The duties of the ministry—the motives which propel us to the faithful discharge of these duties; these are subjects too important in their nature, not to ensure me an attentive hearing from the present audience.

My reverend brethren, the ministry of the gospel, it is true, presents nothing, as far as relates to the things of this world, to allure you. Your career, while engaged in it, useful as it is, is not splendid. The course which you have chosen to pursue is along the cool sequestered walks of life. The performance of those silent duties which are incumbent upon you, is not calculated to attract to you the attentions, or the caresses, or the homage of men. You cannot expect that the honours, the dignities, or the riches of this world await you. If you have imbibed the spirit of your high and holy calling, these are not objects on which you expend a sigh. Your desires, I trust, disengaging themselves from the pomps and vanities of earth, have been elevated to a better, that is to say, a heavenly country. The dignities and honours, after which you should aspire, are those crowns of glory which shall be bestowed upon you as the recompense of your toils in your Redeemer's kingdom. Nevertheless, while you remain on earth, you are connected with your fellow-men by the most interesting and endearing relations. Out of these relations spring many important duties which you should never fail, scrupulously, and to the utmost, to fulfill. Before this enlightened body it is unnecessary that I should dilate upon this part of my subject. It will be sufficient that I slightly touch upon those numerous and arduous duties which are incumbent upon the christian minister.

“Study to show thyself,” says St. Paul to Timothy,

“approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” And again to Titus, says this Apostle of the Gentiles, “in all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.”

This is a portrait of the minister of the gospel drawn by the hand of an illustrious master. “In doctrine,” says he, “showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned.” The ministers of Jesus Christ should be indefatigable in announcing to his people the glad tidings of salvation, and in expounding to them the law and testimony of his God. He should “preach the word in season and out of season.” He should boldly declare the whole counsel of God. He should reprove and rebuke when circumstances demand it, with all confidence and authority. Released from the fear of man, the fear of God only should be the ruling motive of his actions. To gain the favour of men, let him never dare mitigate the rigours of the divine law. His doctrines should never be so modified, and softened, and frittered away, as to suit the corruptions, or the prejudices, or the fastidiousness of his audience. While he is careful to exhibit, on all occasions, both in his language and deportment, that modesty and meekness which are so amiable in the man, and so congenial to the spirit of his ministry, he should never allow a false and culpable distrust of himself, nor a reluctance to excite painful alarms, nor the sometimes innocent apprehension of giving offence, to induce him to apply palliatives where the probe only can effect a cure. Recollecting that the gospel is pre-eminently a dispensation of grace, he should exhaust all the innocent arts of pulpit persuasion, to allure sinners to repentance and

reformation, but should they prove refractory and contumacious, despising his reproofs, and setting at naught his most solemn admonitions, he should clothe himself in the most awful thunders of the gospel. He should never cease in his endeavours to instruct the ignorant, to convince the incredulous, to confirm the wavering, to establish the faith of believers, and to reclaim the guilty. A tender regard to the souls of men, should impart a spirit and an unction to all his addresses, and should animate all his conduct. In all his instructions from the sacred desk, he should closely adhere to that "form of sound words" contained in the scripture. On the one hand, he should carefully avoid all cold moral, metaphysical, or philosophical disquisitions, that contain no solid nutriment for his flock; and on the other, he should refrain with equal solicitude from the ridiculous reveries, the crude and incoherent declamations, the indecent ravings of ignorance and fanaticism. He should deliver the truth as it is in Jesus. He should preach the gospel to his people in its purity, its simplicity, and its energy; ever remembering that it is a sublime code of moral laws enforced by the most powerful evangelical sanctions.

But the toils of the minister of Jesus Christ by no means terminate in the pulpit. From the pulpit he should descend, as did Moses from those thunders, lightnings, and loud trumpet's sounds which shook Sinai, while he promulgated the law, to conduct his people to the promised land. He should be unremittedly attentive to parochial visitations. It is by cultivating habits of intercourse with his people that he becomes acquainted with the field in which he is to labour, that he gains admission to their hearts, engages their affections, and thereby gives tenfold efficacy to his public ministrations. And if the clergyman should sedulously cultivate habits of friendly intercourse with his whole

flock, he should be more particularly attentive to those who stand in need of his assistance. Here he should ever yield a prompt and cheerful obedience to the calls of duty. He should delight to cheer by his presence the houses of mourning. He should be a father to the fatherless of his flock, and a husband to the widow. The wretched should always find in him a comforter; the poor, a friend.

The minister of the gospel should, as far as is practicable, be a man of letters. He should snatch every moment that can be spared from his indispensable avocations, and devote it to the cultivation of science. The more his mind is enlarged by literature, and the more the sphere of his information is extended, the greater, for the most part, will be his success in the service of his Master. What talents and erudition have, in modern times, unhappily for mankind, been enlisted on the side of irreligion! The minister of the gospel should prepare himself, by study and improvement, to resist the enemies of his faith. He should be able to expose their sophistry, to detect their secret machinations, and to repel their open assaults. He should, above all things, make himself acquainted, and profoundly acquainted, with the evidences of our holy religion. He should be able to give a prompt and satisfactory answer to any man who asketh him a reason for the faith that is in him. He should never rest satisfied until he has gained access to all those lights of philosophy, of history, and of antiquity, that serve to illuminate the sacred volume.

These are qualifications which prepare the christian minister to fill, with honour and efficiency, his public station. What should he be in private life? Where is the virtue, or where the grace which should not adorn the lives of the ministers of Him, who hath set before them a model of all the most illustrious virtues and most resplendent graces?

Copying from their Saviour, the great original of moral excellence, they should set examples which their flocks may safely imitate. They should be meek, humble, affable and unassuming in their deportment. To the wisdom of the serpent, enabling them to comprehend their duties, they should unite the harmlessness of the dove. They should, above all other men, be long-suffering, forbearing, and forgiving in their temper and disposition. They should bear with mildness and equanimity, as their Lord has done before them, the contradictions of sinners, the follies, and infirmities, and passions of men. They should be quiet and peaceable members of society. Peculiarly seemly in their profession, is the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. When those strifes, and contentions, and animosities arise, which occasion so large a proportion of the infelicities and miseries of human life, they should take upon them the office of making peace. In a word, like their great Exemplar, they should find their highest delight in doing good. They should be hospitable, benevolent, charitable—Their hands should always be open to the utmost of their ability, to supply the necessities of the indigent—They should observe frugality and simplicity in their domestic economy—They should be temperate in their meat and drink; abstemious in indulging the pleasures of the world—They should scrupulously avoid, in their intercourse with men, all appearance of show, of pride, or ostentation—They should demonstrate that they are not covetous of the paltry riches of earth; but that the riches after which they aspire, are accumulated in that land in which they expect to attain to everlasting rest. The minister of Christ should be a man of prayer, of meditation, and heavenly-mindedness. He should find his meat and drink in performing the exercises of a holy life. His closet, and domestic state, as well as the temples of his God, should

be familiar with the language of his devotions. In fine, he should be exemplary in all his walk and conversation. I know that we should be careful not to exact too much of the ministers of religion. It is to be remembered, that after all, like the rest of mankind, they are but dust and ashes, and must be supposed to have their share of the foibles and imperfections of human nature. But the more they strive to be perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect—the more they exert themselves to attain to that consummation of holiness which was exhibited in the life of their blessed Lord, the nearer will they approximate to it, and the greater will be their progress in the divine life. And what a shame is it, what a scandal to the church, and reproach upon our holy profession, when he who ministers in sacred things, who presumes to come up to the very sanctuary of God, and officiate in the holy of holies, is polluted with vices or irregularities of life? Shall he, whose office it is to promulge the holy laws of God, violate those laws? he who enforces upon others their obligations to live a virtuous and pious life, break through those obligations? Shall those who should set examples to others, have their characters stained and blasted with impurities? Shall they, who are commissioned to call sinners to repentance, themselves stand in most need of penitence? they who should save others, be themselves the first that perish? Surely, if the ministers of the gospel, cannot attain to perfection in holiness, they can at any rate refrain from scandalous offences; if they cannot adorn their profession by their talents and virtues, they can avoid sinking into contempt, disgrace, and scorn.

Such is a very brief view of the duties of the christian minister. To the performance of these duties, you are propelled by numerous and powerful motives. Some of these motives are common to you and the preachers of the gospel

in all ages; others spring out of the peculiar circumstances of our own country.

The examples of Christ and his Apostles, present the first motive to activity and diligence in performing the duties of your sacred office. You well know what the great Founder of our religion sustained in the propagation of the gospel. You have often wept at the recital of his sufferings. From the period in which he commenced the duties of the ministry, his life was but an uninterrupted series of the most frightful ills which can assail human nature. He denied himself all the enjoyments of earth, in order to promote the happiness of mankind—He had not a place on which to lay his head—He had to pursue his way through numberless fatigues and difficulties, while environed by dangers from his cruel persecutors—He, at length, fell a sacrifice to their virulence and fury—He poured out on Calvary his precious blood. These are the ills our blessed Lord encountered in the promulgation of his gospel—And shall we be discouraged by the few difficulties with which we meet—difficulties, which, when compared with his, are lighter than the dust of the balance? When we feel our zeal cooling, let us go to the garden of Gethsemane, and see our Lord labouring under those pangs which occasioned his bloody sweat; to the hall of Pilate that witnessed his indignities and injuries; or to the hill of Calvary, on which, amidst the agonies of crucifixion, he resigned his breath; and catch new fervour in the sacred cause.

But if it be imagined, that in the character of the Saviour, there was a sublimity of excellence which renders it imitable—if it be supposed that his virtues were of so exalted and transcendant nature, that we cannot aspire after a perfect imitation of them; look at his Apostles. They were feeble men like ourselves; yet what an illustrious example

have they set us! They have acted a part in the great work of promulging christianity little less than divine. My mind is filled with emotions of the highest degree of the sublime, when I follow these great men through their glorious career. Setting off from the tomb of their Saviour, a spark issues from his ashes, that kindles within them unquenchable ardour in his service. They pursue their way through difficulties, and discouragements, and the most formidable dangers. The church presents to their view only the similitude of a fiery furnace, heated by the flames of persecution; yet these true sons of Israel walk, undaunted, in the midst of it—They traverse every region with incredible rapidity—They sow the seeds of gospel-truth with equal success amidst the wilderness of barbarous life, and in the cultivated fields of science and philosophy—Hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness, bonds and imprisonments, are their daily fare—Some shed their blood in Judea, others in the East, some in the South, others in the West; yet none are discouraged, none relax in their exertions, none shrink back from the perilous enterprise on which they have embarked. My God! what a motive does the conduct of these holy men offer to us of activity and zeal in the propagation of the gospel! With such animating examples before us, can we sink into a criminal and fatal apathy?

The pre-eminent excellence of that church to which you belong, in her doctrines, discipline, and forms of worship, presents another incentive to unremitted activity and zeal in discharging the functions of your sacred office.—In the midst of those numberless errors which divide and dishonour christendom, you are assured that you find in her doctrines the lamp of pure and primitive truth, and in her exterior form, the glorious model of apostolic government and order. The very plan upon which our reformers pro-

ceeded with a moderation, a caution, and a comprehension which have done them immortal honour, was to separate the genuine ore of christianity, from the dross and rubbish which had been connected with it during its progress through the dark, and gloomy periods of its history. To this end were directed all their researches into primitive history and antiquity—To this end were devoted all their zeal and assiduity in preaching; and to its accomplishment, many of them willingly and triumphantly shed their blood. My brethren: this is a topic, on which I can never dwell without feeling my bosom dilate with conscious enthusiasm and exultation—The interests of this church are ever near my heart—Attached to her from the earliest recollections, as well as from the habits of education, and first brought within her sacred pale to recognize the existence and presence of a Deity, and to acknowledge the endearing claims of a Redeemer, I have found with sacred pride, my early prepossessions in her favour, sanctioned and confirmed by the subsequent convictions of my understanding—I have found her upon examination, all that my most fervent wishes could have led me to desire, or my most sanguine hopes to anticipate; pure and unadulterated in her doctrines, primitive in her form of government, of pre-eminent chastity and simplicity in her rites and ceremonies, of unrivalled excellence and sublimity in her forms of worship, and exhibiting throughout her whole frame and organization, a beautiful and glorious model of that church, which, in the first and golden age of christianity, was fashioned by the hands of Christ himself, and his Apostles, and cemented with their blood. Such is the truly primitive and apostolic church to which we belong, both in her internal principles and external structure. True, she retained not her primeval purity and perfection, during her passage through the dark ages,

but becoming deteriorated, corrupted, and sullied, was infested with all those monstrous errors in doctrine, and abuses in practice, that fraud and superstition could engender in the bosom of ignorance and blind credulity—but, at the revival of true religion and learning in Europe, under the master hands of our illustrious reformers, she was restored to her primitive glory and beauty, and became the pride and bulwark of the reformation.—It is this church, so venerable for her antiquity, so admirable both in her internal and external frame and organization, of such surpassing excellence and sublimity in her forms of worship, whose destinies are, under her great Head, entrusted to our care. And shall not our most strenuous exertions be directed to guard her from dangers, and promote her peace and prosperity? Far be it from me, to wish to excite among you a spirit of bigotry and intolerance, the fruitful parents of persecution and all that horrid progeny of mischiefs and miseries that follow in its train—But is a warm and decided preference of our own church, inconsistent with the sentiments of good will and brotherly kindness, to all denominations of christians? While we conceive them to have deviated both in doctrine and practice, from the truth once delivered to the saints, and would make use of all lawful and proper expedients to bring them back to what we must ever regard as the true fold of Christ; cannot we cherish a delicate and scrupulous respect for their rights of conscience? In a word, is there no medium between universal latitudinarianism and bigotry, and intolerance—between a criminal neglect earnestly to contend for the faith, and lighting the fires of persecution—between embracing or justifying the errors that prevail, and consigning our brethren over to the wheel of the inquisitor? In order not to violate the great and fundamental law of charity, must we close our eyes against the

light of truth, or seal our mouths, and cease to proclaim it? God forbid!—This would be to abandon the post assigned us by high heaven, and to become traitors to the sacred cause of religion.—What! Shall it be required of us, as a part of christian charity, to be silent, when we see such errors broached and propagated, as are eating out, like a canker, the very core of religion among us, and some of which are evils that present a most formidable and portentous aspect to the very existence of christianity itself? Are our mouths to remain hermetically sealed, when we behold some overthrow the fundamental principles of that venerable and goodly order of church government by Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, dispensed to us by the sacred hand of her divine founder and head, and promulge doctrines that would throw a shade of malignity over the benign moral character of the Almighty; and others, refusing to extend to our beloved offspring, the precious privilege of being initiated into the mysteries of faith and adopted into the holy family of God? some waging war again stall externals in religion, and discarding even the sacraments themselves, which Christ hath bestowed on us as the endearing pledges of his love, and the richest nutriment of the pious soul; others converting the worship of God, who requires us to serve him in spirit and in truth, into scenes of confusion and wild uproar? some relaxing the very springs of the of the divine government, and stripping the gospel of its most awful sanctions, by denying those future tremendous penalties which it represents as the portion of the guilty, and thereby opening a door to boundless licentiousness, and profligacy of manners? others embracing the scheme and uttering the language of the impious Socinus, muttering blasphemies against the Son of God, denying the very Lord who bought them, and whose sacred name they pre-

sume to wear, when by rejecting his divinity they would take from christianity its very life-blood? When errors such as these are prevalent, some of which are not only false in theory, but most mischievous in their influence upon society, shall any considerations withhold us from raising our voice against them? We would not, indeed, wish to interfere with the sacred rights of conscience, and prescribe limits to an unbounded freedom of opinion; or subject the understandings of mankind to the restraints of law and coercion. The weapons of that warfare which we would carry on against errors, are not carnal, but spiritual—We would meet them in the fair field of argument, under the full conviction that truth, if her advocates are faithful to her cause, will ultimately triumph. Let our ministers, therefore, while they attempt not to interfere with the modes of worship instituted by other denominations of christians, be staunch to their own principles, imbibe the genuine spirit of an Episcopalian ministry, preach the unadulterated doctrines of the cross, and rigorously conform to that liturgy, which in my estimation, (and in this opinion, I am supported by many men of the most approved taste and extensive erudition) is of a more various and surpassing excellence than any uninspired compositions extant in our language or perhaps in any other.—And here, my brethren, you will allow me to remark, as another motive to industry, that refreshing to the souls of the faithful as are the symptoms which have lately displayed themselves in our churches in this country, of an increased attention to the duties of religion—it is not to be denied, and I repeat it to our shame, and could do it even with weeping; it is not to be denied, that a dreadful coldness, indifference and apathy have seized us concerning the interests of our church, of religion, and even in regard to our everlasting salvation.

While I deprecate the introduction among us of a blind, fiery and misguided zeal; what would I not give to see prevalent, the genuine ardours of an enlightened and well directed devotion! Would to God! That I could catch its sacred glows from the altars of heaven, and breathe them into your bosoms in all their purifying, renovating, and enlivening efficacy—Blessed with a church, having pre-eminent claims to purity, antiquity, and divine authority, in whose services we find the unadulterated word of God, the fabric of whose ecclesiastical government is fashioned upon the apostolic model, and whose exterior rites and ceremonies are distinguished by the simplicity of the early ages, we know not how to appreciate these inestimable privileges—How indolently are our churches attended for the purposes of public worship! how little frequented the sacred altars of our God! How cold and indevout are we in our exercises of devotion, in performing our impassioned services! In the eagerness and inordinate desire with which we engage in the pursuit of pleasure, and amidst the intoxication produced by that whirlpool of dissipation in which we are tossed, all serious thoughts of futurity are excluded from our minds—Added to this morbid lethargy in our most important concerns and this rage for frivolous or licentious indulgence, a gloomy and baleful plague of infidelity is creeping up to the heart, fraezing the warm current of our immortal hopes, and stopping the pulse of spiritual life among us. These are symptoms which should alarm our fears and stimulate us to activity—They are sources from which may spring numberless future dangers and disasters. Were we all as alert, active and zealous in the defence and edification of our Zion, as we should be; we should be less exposed to the inroads of fanaticism and a wild enthusiasm, as well as to the bolder invasions of our open and more formidable

enemies. And is there no mode, my christian brethren, by which you can be roused from the torpor of indifference and animated into some concern for religion, and your everlasting interests? The doctrines of our holy religion are too awful to be lightly regarded by you, the salvation of the soul, too momentous to be thus shamefully neglected, eternity too dreadful an object thus to live in a total and criminal forgetfulness of it—Considerations of this kind should penetrate deeply into our hearts, awaken within them salutary fears, and touch all the springs of religious sensibility. In the moral and religious state of the people of our church, we cannot deny, that there is urgent need of amendment; but let not this be attempted by deviations from her regular order, but rather by putting into vigorous operation, all those means which she has established for the improvement and salvation of her members. We want excited among us a spirit of greater devotedness to our Creator, of moderation, self-denial and abstemiousness in our enjoyments, and of prayer and supplication in public, in our domestic state and in private—Perhaps, there are no three moral causes, that have so great an influence upon nations, families, and individuals, as public, domestic, and private devotion. In proportion as these are neglected, nations hasten to their declension and downfall, families to extinction and private persons to ruin—And for all these three modes of intercourse with heaven, has our church made large, and ample provision in her admirable forms of worship—Would we but give full effect to her wise, and wholesome institutions and ordinances, and catch that fervent, devout and heavenly spirit, which she breathes, what a holy and zealous clergy and people should we become, what a praise in the earth, what bright and glorious examples to our christian brethren! But, on the other hand, if instead of imbibing the devo-

tional spirit of our church, and conforming to her institutions, the heads of families among us, totally neglect or indolently attend, the public worship of Almighty God—if they violate without scruple the holy sabbath, and evidence their contempt for the ordinances of religion by keeping at a distance from those altars at which they are administered—if family worship is totally omitted by them as well as the devotions of their closets—in a word, if they exhibit no outward proof, that they live in the fear of God and in the performance of religious duties, what are we to expect but that the condition of the church will wax worse and worse, until it falls into ruins; but that the rising generation, their beloved offspring, will permit their ardent sensibilities, unrestrained by the discipline of a virtuous and pious education, to shoot forth into all the most odious and pernicious forms of criminal excess? But upon this subject a treatise might be written of itself, so copious is it, and interesting to the feelings—The coldness and indifference which prevail in matters of religion should suggest another motive to the zealous performance of the duties of the ministry.

You should be excited to zeal and industry in your holy vocation, in the next place, from considering the inveterate and mischievous libertinism of the age. The tares of unbelief, unhappily for mankind, were sown in England, and on the continent of Europe, along with the good seeds of the reformation—It was the natural progress of the human mind to make this transition from the extreme of superstition, of a foul and abominable superstition, to that of infidelity. It was not to be wondered at, if when mankind had once thrown off the shackles of papal dominion, and the thunders of the Vatican ceased to drown the voice of enquiry, they felt some reluctance at such a season, to submit to the wholesome control even of the genuine doctrines of the faith.

Various causes contributed, at the same time, to introduce among the literati a spirit of scepticism and unbelief. The revival of letters during this century and the consequent distaste which was at first excited among learned men by an acquaintance with the classics, for the doctrines of christianity as couched in the jargon of the monks—the abhorrence of popery, (then the only name for christianity,) which was naturally awakened, when the lights of science that were enkindled, disclosed to view its horrid corruptions and abominations; the superficial attainments which would, at such a time, be made in literature, and which were then, and always have been unfriendly to religion*—the systems of philosophy, which about the same period were revived or broached anew, that tended to give the mind a captious and sceptical cast; all these causes and more than these, contributed to the origin and growth of the principles of unbelief, at the time of the reformation. The vain reason of man had not yet been allowed time, after arousing from those slumbers of ignorance and superstition in which it

* See all these points illustrated by Bishop Warburton in his sermon on the influence of learning on revelation. In that masterly performance, speaking of the unfriendly tendency towards religion which superficial knowledge has on the minds of men, he says, “Hence it is we find the leaders and professors of free-thinking to have been generally of this class of men. And hence it is that there are now fewer unbelievers amongst men eminent in the learned professions than at the revival of letters. For as science has kept advancing, and the theory of nature opened, men’s hard thoughts of revelation have gradually lessened and subsided. The philosophy of Aristotle, when the schools first got to its source in the sixteenth century, inclined the Italian literati to Atheism; and the new inventions of Descartes, in the seventeenth, disposed the French to naturalism. They have now both given place to the true theory of nature. And Newton, as well by his doctrine as example, has taught the philosophic world to believe and tremble.”

had been so long sunk, to exhaust itself with forming visionary systems of philosophy, and to discover by painful experience, that after all its efforts at inventing new theories and indulging novel speculations, true wisdom will be found in taking refuge in the sublime system of revealed religion. Accordingly, we find that this has been done, at subsequent periods in the history of science. The age of Newton, of Locke, Boyle, and those illustrious men who appeared with them, was the age of the true philosophy, and it was the age also of revelation—These great men have proved that the true religion has nothing to apprehend from the true philosophy—Whilst in one hand, they held the torch which darted its penetrating rays through the works of God, both in the physical and moral world, in the other, they held that which illuminated his word. They have rendered their names as sacred to the altar as to literature—Instead of becoming the enemies of our religion, they are her pride. In fact, true philosophy never has been and never will be hostile to pure christianity—On the contrary, it has proved her hand-maid, and ablest support. It has strengthened the foundation on which she rests, and erected around her the most impregnable bulwarks. While, however, we recollect with pleasure and exultation, the noble example set by these truly great men, to the philosophic world, we have to lament that there have been found philosophers who have discovered a different spirit, and have converted those exalted powers of the understanding bestowed on them by their Creator, into weapons with which to wage an ungrateful and impious war against him.* For the most part, how-

* It is reported that Sir Isaac Newton once said to the celebrated Dr. Halley, who (it seems) sometimes spoke slightly of revealed religion, "Dr. Halley, I am always glad to hear you when you speak about astro-

ever, it may be remarked, that, although the enemies of christianity have sometimes discovered a profound acquaintance with other branches of science, yet they have evidenced at the same time, a shameful ignorance of theological—that with which of all others they ought to have made themselves acquainted, before they presumed to commit any overt acts of hostility against the holy religion of their fathers. “I very much doubt, says an elegant writer, whether a single instance can be given of a truly philosophic mind, that understood christianity and disbelieved it.”*

In recent times, we have seen infidelity arise with augmented boldness and augmented virulence. We have seen plans which had, no doubt, been long before meditated by

nomys or other parts of mathematics, because it is a subject which you have studied and well understand; but you should not talk of Christianity, for you have not *studied* it; I *have*, and know that you know nothing of the matter.” The gross ignorance of Voltaire in theological matters has been amply exposed in the “Jews Letters;” and we have never yet seen any thing from the pen of Mr. Hume which shows him to have been better versed in them. And I am sure that no one will be inclined to think Mr. Paine an exception from this rule, or he would not have brought forward with so much confidence, objections which had been again and again refuted. Would to God, that men would but take the trouble to make themselves acquainted with the evidences of our holy religion, before they reject it. The number of unbelievers would then be few indeed. It is only from imperfect and partial views of the subject that men are led to discredit her pretensions. A more thorough examination would produce conviction, and settle them in the faith. This has been uniformly and invariably the result in the case of all those who have entered upon a candid and serious investigation of the claims of our religion to credit and authority. Lord Lyttleton, the elder, acknowledges that in his youth he was inclined to scepticism; but that more mature research made him a Christian. This was also the case with Mr. Gilbert West, and many others that might be enumerated.

* Dr. Beattie, in his Evidences.

the hopeful members of the same fraternity, completely concocted, and carried into execution, to exterminate christianity. We have seen this leaven of infidelity fermenting, until it has overturned empires, and accomplished its baleful work in levelling, for a while, our holy religion with the dust over one of the fairest portions of the globe. We have seen it fill that unhappy country with desolation and carnage. Nor have we, my brethren, been exempt from the influence of those principles which produced convulsions in the old world that shook it to its centre. The tares of unbelief that produced such destructive fruits on the continent of Europe, have found in our country, a soil but too favourable to their growth and propagation. About the time of our revolution, and some years afterwards, a period of ferment in which the mind was, as it were, loosened from the moorings of reason and the control of steady principles and habits, and of course in a condition the best fitted to receive any impressions that might be made on it by the apostles of irreligion—I say, at this season, so favourable as was imagined for the purpose, some pestilent productions were industriously circulated among the people, and the attempt made to link the malign and mischievous cause of atheism and irreligion with the humane and noble one of civil liberty—Thanks be rendered to that kind and good providence, which defeated this dark and malignant purpose, and which, in bestowing on us those excellent free institutions, which we at present enjoy, extended to us, at the same time, the only pillar which can sustain them, the holy religion of the Saviour. We still have it, however, deeply to lament, that although the pieces before alluded to, failed of their great object, yet they have but too much vitiated and poisoned the public mind—Are we not still sensible of their destructive fruits, in the deplorable neglect and inattention to the

ordinances of religion and in the unblushing avowal of the principles of unbelief? Do we not see these principles by infecting the young and rising generation, contaminating the public morals at the fountain head, and awakening in the bosom of the patriot the most painful apprehensions for the future destiny of our country? My brethren, it is true that the church enjoys, at this season, perfect tranquillity, and that the rage of her enemies, which but a short time ago threatened her peace and existence, has abated in its malignity and been checked in its circulation; but should we permit our vigilance against its approach and encroachments to be intermitted, or our exertions relaxed? The great antichrist, no longer walks forth with so unblushing a front, openly insulting heaven with its impieties and breathing destruction against the powers of earth, but when operating in secret may it not be tending as surely towards the accomplishment of its grand object? May it not be sapping the foundations of christianity? For my part, I am of opinion, that although this blasphemous spirit has ceased to convulse, and waste christendom, it still presents to us a most dangerous and formidable aspect. Its fatal poison is found every where—The student meets with it in the treatise of philosophy, in real and fictitious history, in the narrative of the traveller, in the productions of the muse—The very fountains of science are now poisoned with it. This poison has incorporated itself into the wholesome food of knowledge. While we are pouring that aliment into the mind of youth which is necessary to its expansion and its growth to maturity, it is imbibing along with it this noxious infusion—It has diffused its tincture over the most popular productions of the day. If the ordinary reader take up the small pamphlet for his amusement, this ephemeron also, lives not its day in his fancy, without leaving behind at its departure, this fatal venom. Are we not, then, in real

and imminent danger? Are not the rising generation, when thus circumtanced, objects of peculiar solicitude? My reverend brethren, these evils, if remedied at all, must be remedied by your efforts; your province is it to provide an antidote to this poison. If the progress of infidelity be checked, it must be checked by the diligence of the clergy. Be active, then; summon all your strength to stem the torrent. Make yourselves profoundly acquainted with the evidences of our holy religion. Ground your flocks well in these evidences. Take peculiar care of the religious education of the young. In the period of youth those deep impressions may be made upon the minds in favour of virtue and religion, which can never afterwards be entirely obliterated.

Such and so formidable is infidelity at the present age. And what, my brethren, is this infidelity of which we speak? what is the character it has displayed in the history of man? It appears, indeed, outwardly comely unto men, and speaks a fair and glozing language, but, when stripped of its disguises, what is it? Let me pause for a few moments to portray it to you.

Infidelity is the true Antichrist, of which all other Antichrists are but counterparts. Ever since the days of old Celsus, and even from the Apostolic age, it has existed in the Church of Christ, but has never been completely unveiled until recent times.* Infidelity is that power which maintains a

* It will be seen that the infidelity which is here attempted to be described, is of that dark and malignant kind which prevailed among the illuminati of France and Germany, at the period in which Atheism, along with Anarchy, was established by law; when the Son of God was proclaimed to be an impostor, and his Gospel a forgery; and when these mad zealots of impiety bound themselves by an oath to exterminate Christianity.—Unbelievers in general, indeed, will disavow such shocking doctrines as are here ascribed to them, but in doing so they are unfaithful to

firm and perpetual league with the grand adversary of God and man. Like him, an apostate spirit fallen from its primitive dignity, it wages incessant war against heaven and all holy things. To accomplish its plans of hostility against Christ and his heavenly kingdom, it has had recourse to numberless stratagems. Sometimes it has essayed secretly to undermine the holy religion of the Saviour; at other times, it has assailed it with open violence. Sometimes it has assumed the form of an angel of light, and under this disguise has gained admission amongst the hosts of the Lord, and tried to seduce them from their allegiance and duty to him; at other times, appearing in its genuine shape, as an angel of darkness, has spit against them its bitterest venom. But if you wish to see disclosed the deep malignity of the nature of infidelity, and those secret designs by which it is always actuated, although sometimes it dares not openly avow them, you must trace its footsteps through the continent of Europe in recent times. There it has exhibited its real character, there developed its dark purposes, and there pro-

their own principles. The same difficulties in revealed religion which stagger their belief and drive them into the quarters of the enemy, are found also in natural religion.—The fact is, that as soon as the mind is loosened from its adherence to the orthodox doctrines of the Church, there is no middle point at which it can stop. Like a bark swung from its moorings, it floats and fluctuates on a sea of uncertainty, and finds no resting-place until it plunges into the gulph of Atheism. The French infidels, therefore, only carried their principles to their just extent. It is in vain that the enemies of religion have endeavoured to cloak their real principles by assuming the modest appellation of Deists. The first title that was given them was the true one, that of Atheists. This is expressive of their real sentiments. It has not, however, for more than a century past, suited their purpose. Once they were contented with indulging their libertinism of themselves, or at most with initiating the learned into the mysteries of their iniquity; but in later times they have attempted to gain over the populace, and the frightful name of Atheists would have proved too powerful a repellent.

duced its baleful fruits. And what is infidelity or the true Antichrist, as there disclosed to view, rising out of the rank and venomous bosom of the modern school? At one time, it is a demon, which, not contented with tearing from their foundations all the sacred establishments of the world, would wage impious war against the government of God, would demolish his awful throne, and strike him from the universe; at another time, it is a Moloch, delighting in the blood of the Saints, immolating human victims to sate its cruel appetite. It walks perpetually to and fro on the earth, the most active spirit that co-operates with the prince of darkness, in effecting his purposes of ruin. Temples, altars, sacrifices, all sacred institutions, are the objects of its irreconcilable hatred. These it pursues with exterminating virulence. It enters with deadly intent also within the precincts of civil society. It would sever the strongest bonds which connect mankind together. Its progress there has been marked with revolutions, with anarchy and with blood. A missionary from the dominions of chaos and old night, it would restore their confused and tumultuous reign. Nor does infidelity here stop its course.* Like a malignant genius, it essays to extend its sway into the bosom of man, and disturb its peace. It would entinguish all his hopes, blast his best prospects, and dry up all the fountains of his comfort. It sounds its raven voice over the bed of the sufferer, the knell to all his expectations of succour. Whilst with one hand, it would wrest from the mouth of man the purest cups of his enjoyment; with the other it would pour out those vials, that would give tenfold bitterness to his

* This is the infidelity of Hume, Voltaire, and the other illuminati, that infidelity which would blot out a God from the universe, deny his providence, and 'make' death an eternal sleep. Of such a principle this cannot be considered as an exaggerated representation.

sorrows. The poor it would render hopeless, the wretched inconsolable, the bereaved desperate. It would draw the curtain of midnight, (if I may speak so,) over the hemisphere of man's lot. Through it no ray of light could penetrate to cheer him. When infidelity has thus despoiled man of his sweetest enjoyments, and infused a deeper-tinged gall into his sorrows, it would cut him off from all intercourse with God; it would convert the heavens into a canopy of brass, against which all his importunities and complaints would strike and die away in fruitless reverberation, no ear of divine mercy being found there to receive them. And, to conclude this work of horror, when infidelity has thus stripped man of all his hopes, his consolations, and his best enjoyments; when it has transformed the earth into a dungeon, in which he is immured without being visited by a single ray of light, it follows him even to the bed of death. It sounds in his ears the most dismal omens. It dashes from his lips the last drop of consolation which can mitigate the sharpness of that bitter draught. It goes still farther—it exhibits its gloomy form even amidst the repositories of the dead. With ruthless hand, it would extinguish all those lights that cheer the fainting spirit, as she pursues her trembling way through that dreary passage. It would snatch the keys of death and the grave from the hands of Him who bears them, as trophies of that victory he has obtained over them, and conduct mankind into their silent chambers; and then, bolting, irreversibly bolting the gates of heaven against them, would there leave them to worms, to rottenness, and oblivion. As watchmen on the walls of Zion, should you not guard against the approaches of so dreadful an enemy?

In the next place, my reverend brethern, the importance of your exertions to the temporal and eternal interest of mankind should prove a powerful motive to industry.

The temporal interests of mankind are abundantly advanced by your efforts in preaching the gospel. That religion is indispensably necessary to the welfare and even the existence of civil society, is a maxim which has been consecrated by the experience of ages. And surely it will be allowed on all hands, that never was there a religion known, so benign in the effects it produces in the world, as christianity. What wonders of utility did it not effect at its introduction! How salutary has been its sway at every period of its history! At its commencement, the immense structures of Pagan superstition sunk before it. On the ruins of the temples of idolatrous worship, it erected the worship of the one only living and true God—in place of the absurd, obscene, and abominable mythology of the Heathens, it substituted the purest and most sublime theology. It bore along with it a system of moral truth more simple, luminous and perfect, and armed with more awful sanctions, than the schools had been able to attain by the toils of ages. Under its genial influence the Jew shook off his national antipathies, the Gentile forsook his idols of wood and stone, the horrors of war were diminished, human sacrifices and many other barbarous customs were abolished, the oracles of imposture were silenced, man became humanized in his sentiments and refined in his manners; in a word, men felt themselves more intimately united with each other, the bonds of society were strengthened and cemented. Wherever this peace-breathing religion went, the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled, “the wilderness and the solitary were made glad, and the desert rejoiced and blossomed as the rose.” Such was once the benign influence of christianity, and such, or similar to these are the effects it still continues to produce when the hearts of men are truly subjected to its sway. It controls those passions that poison the intercourse of mankind, it moderates

those desires which when they become inordinate disturb the peace of the bosom, it calls into exercise all those benevolent affections which in their operation, are like healing streams, that flow through society, mitigating its sorrows, soothing its cares, and sweetening its enjoyments. In fine, by its sublime morality, it heightens and refines our principles of virtue; by its awful sanctions, it constrains us to holiness; by its precious hopes, it consoles and supports us amidst the toils of duty. Imbibing its bland influence, the savage of the wilderness shakes off his ferocity, loses his thirst for blood, lays aside the horrid instruments of barbarous warfare, takes up the implements and cultivates the arts of husbandry and peace, and learns to feel the dignity of his nature. Under the mild but efficient control of our religion, the tranquillity of states is preserved, rulers learn to exercise their sway in righteousness and equity, subjects to yield submission to just authority, all classes of men, due subordination. In a political point of light, therefore, the offices you perform, are of the highest importance. Most egregiously mistaken in their political views are those who suppose the influence of the clergy to be inimical to the civil liberties of mankind.

But, if the offices you perform are important as they relate to the temporal interests of men, infinitely more important are they, when it is considered, that, with your faithfulness in discharging them, are connected their everlasting interests. How interesting the reflection! that upon our efforts may it depend whether many of our fellow-men shall be everlastingly happy or miserable in a future world! O man of God! and canst thou, under this impression, give sleep to thine eyes, or slumber to thine eye-lids, until thou hast fulfilled to the utmost thy duty in calling sinners from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God?

Other men have charge of their own salvation only; you are, in a degree, accountable for the salvation of all those entrusted to your care. How ardent should be the prayers with which you importune the throne of mercy for the flocks over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers! how deep the desire of your hearts for their salvation!

And this consideration is rendered still more awful, when we connect with it the associated one, that, for your attention to the souls entrusted to you, you are responsible to Jesus Christ, the Bishop of souls. His all-seeing eye dwells upon your conduct—he inscribes on the records of eternity the services of faithful pastors—He prepares for them brighter crowns and more glorious habitations, than for other men, in the kingdom of heaven. They shall shine there with the refulgent glories of the sun. But the names of slothful and faithless pastors shall be blotted out of the book of life. A deeper condemnation is reserved for them on the day of retribution. Should we not approach this sacred office, this ark of the covenant, with fear and trembling? Should not a sacred awe seize us while this holy burthen presses on our shoulders? Listen to the terms on which our Divine Master granted us our charter—"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore, hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I shall say unto the wicked thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand." Do not your hearts sink within you at the thought, that through your delinquency in duty, a single sinner shall perish and his blood rise up and speak against you at the bar of your Lord? Yet, if you slumber and sleep whilst the situation of your flocks requires you to be vigilant at

your posts—if you permit them to perish for the want of that food which you are commissioned to dispense—if you see them environed with perils and do not give them warning—secure in sin and do not endeavour to awake them, indulging groundless hopes and do not undeceive them; what better destiny have you any reason to anticipate? On the other hand, what delight will it give to the faithful pastor to render in his account to his supreme Lord—Here am I, Jesus, Master! he shall say, and those whom thou hast given me. Thine they were, and thine they shall be to all eternity; and I thank thee that thou rendered me the humble instrument of gathering them into thy fold on earth, and at last conducting them to thy heavenly kingdom. Blessed, indeed, is that servant whom his Lord at his coming shall find thus prepared to meet him. Did you ever endeavour to realize your emotions, if, when you shall stand in the paradise of God, a single soul shall approach, and say of you, my God! this is that wise steward whom thou didst make ruler over thy household, and to whom I feel myself indebted, under the operation of thy Holy Spirit, for my everlasting salvation? To him I owe it, that I now enjoy thy blisful presence, heavenly Father! and that I have entered into the rest which thou hast provided for thy holy people. Will not the happiness derived from such a source invigorate the joys of the paradise above? Can the human mind conceive of a more powerful motive to diligence and assiduity in the performance of our sacred duties?

And now what shall I, what need I say more to excite you to zeal and activity in your holy vocation? Need I remind you of the exquisite pleasure, which to the good man, whose heart and affections are engaged in the sacred cause, is found in the performance of your blessed task? You know what this pleasure is; you know that it proves a cordial to

your spirits, amidst all your fatigues and difficulties, trials and sufferings. The world, indeed, imagines that the task which you perform is an irksome one, and that your life is joyless and gloomy. It was never more mistaken; it knows not the exalted consolations of the ministry. Jesus Christ permits not his anointed to be comfortless—No, my Saviour! had we nothing but the advantage of more frequent and familiar intercourse with thee, we would not exchange this gratification for all that a corrupt world has to bestow.

Yes, my reverend brethren, your occupation is a most exalted and delightful one. What employment more delightful than to be wholly devoted to the service of a merciful God, a kind and good master? What can afford more gratification to the benevolent mind, than to be the messengers to convey to a fallen and depraved race, the glad tidings of pardon and reconciliation from their God; to publish peace to them? What can be more grateful to the feeling heart than to be instrumental in the everlasting salvation of mankind? There is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. Happy, then; thrice happy is he who is made the humble instrument to lead him to repentance! In short, what can give you a more exalted satisfaction than that which your sacred office guarantees to you, to co-operate with your Lord in his works of mercy, to comfort those that mourn, to bind up the broken hearted, to preach the gospel to the poor, and to assuage to the departing spirit, the last throes of dissolving nature? No, O my God! to whose sacred service we have devoted ourselves, we desire no other joys but those which can be drawn from thy sanctuary! Henceforth we would devote ourselves with renewed fervor to the fulfilment of those holy duties, which thou hast imposed upon us. Great shepherd of thy flock! do thou strengthen our hands and comfort our hearts amidst our toils and

difficulties; make us instrumental in turning many sinners from the error of their ways to the service of the living God, who shall be the pledges of our usefulness in this life, and the crowns of our rejoicing in the world to come. Accompany all our exertions with the quickening energy of thy holy spirit, and when our labours on earth shall be terminated; when we shall have finished our course, do thou, O God! prepare us all to receive the divine benediction, "Well done ye good and faithful servants; enter ye into the joys of your Lord."

Such are the duties of the christian minister, and such the powerful motives which should propel us to the faithful discharge of those duties. And exhausted as must be both your time and patience, I cannot conclude, without requesting you my Brethren of the Laity, to extend to the clergy, in all their endeavours, your most cordial co-operation and support.—They can do little unless aided by you, and since they are toiling for your advantage, surely, it is but reasonable to expect that you should discover a readiness to exert yourselves in order to augment their influence and usefulness. Let us conjointly direct our exertions towards promoting the interests of our common christianity, but more particularly of that church, to which we belong. Let all things be transacted among us in decency, and harmony, and order.—Let us closely adhere in all our public offices to our pure and admirable forms of worship, and revive, if possible, the wholesome rigors of ancient discipline. Pure in our doctrines, we should be equally pure in our practice. Let us deprecate as one of the greatest curses, all discord and dissension in our public councils. Framing our canons, in the most mature and deliberate wisdom, let us execute them to the utmost of our ability.—We are assembled here for the purpose of consulting the great interests of the church

of Christ; let us bear it in mind that we sustain a charge of immense and awful magnitude. The destiny of thousands yet unborn may depend upon the efforts we now make. We are laying the foundations of a church, which, if she be sufficiently nursed and cultivated will become the glory of our new world. Let us never be weary in our endeavours to extend her doctrine, discipline and forms of worship—Let us act unitedly and harmoniously, in the furtherance of this great and primary object. Let us strive to revive among us a spirit of pure and vital piety. Let our ministers preach the genuine doctrines of the Cross, and our people become more and more sedulous, in their attention to their religious duties. In a word, let us become a holy, and we shall infallibly be also a happy ministry and people. And to this blessed issue, may God, in his infinite mercy, bring us for Christ sake—Amen.





